



College Process Handbook 2025-2026



Welcome to the College Process

In the wise words of Dr. Seuss, “You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself, any direction you choose!” Each of you has a bright future ahead and within your four years of Holy Cross, the hope is that you have created and pursued your dreams, lived your life to the fullest and are prepared for the next challenge ahead.

This booklet gives you the details of the college search and application process, beginning with how to begin the process to eventually applying to colleges. Topics include:

- College Counseling Timeline
- SAT & ACT Dates and Registration Deadlines
- Naviance
- Requesting Letters of Recommendation Through Naviance
- Creating a College List
- College Representative Visits 2025
- Visiting College Campuses
- College Interviews
- College Application Process
- College Essay
- Financial Aid

The Counseling Department is here to help you along this journey and will advise you in a direction that leads to success! Please feel free to stop by to see us anytime, schedule an appointment or email us with questions. We look forward to working with you to find the most suitable school for you!

Best of Luck,

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COLLEGE COUNSELING TIMELINE FOR CLASS OF 2026

March 26, 2025	College Information Night
Spring 2025	Juniors/Parents Meeting (by request)
September 15, 2025 (6:30pm)	Seniors and Parents Information Night
September - December 2025	Student and Parent meetings with counselor as needed
September – November 2025	College Admissions Representatives visit Holy Cross
October 1, 2025	FAFSA- first day to submit application for processing
October 8, 2025	SAT (offered at HC)
November 1 and 15, 2025	Deadlines- many colleges Early Decision (ED) and Early Action (EA) deadline
December 2025	Please note that the Counseling Office will not be open during the Christmas holiday vacation. Students should plan ahead and request their transcripts and recommendations be sent to colleges at least one week before school vacation.
December 2025 - May 2026	Inform counselor of all of your college decisions!!
April 1, 2026	Most colleges provide admission decisions and financial aid packages by this date.
May 1, 2026	Universal Reply Date (students must respond to colleges regarding their enrollment decision)

SAT DATES AND REGISTRATION DEADLINES

TEST DATE		REGISTRATION DEADLINE	LATE REGISTRATION DEADLINE
May 3, 2025	At Holy Cross	April 18, 2025	April 22, 2025
June 7, 2025	Digital	May 22, 2025	May 27, 2025
September 13, 2025	Digital	August 29, 2025	September 2, 2025
October 4, 2025	Digital	September 19, 2025	September 23, 2025
October 8, 2025	At Holy Cross	September 15, 2025 (thru HC)	
November 8, 2025	Digital	October 24, 2025	October 28, 2025
December 6, 2025	At Holy Cross	November 21, 2025	November 25, 2025
March 14, 2026	Digital	February 27, 2026	March 3, 2026
May 2, 2026	At Holy Cross	April 17, 2026	April 21, 2026
June 6, 2026	Digital	May 22, 2026	May 26, 2026

To register, please visit www.collegeboard.org

ACT DATES AND REGISTRATION DEADLINES

TEST DATE	REGISTRATION DEADLINE	LATE REGISTRATION DEADLINE
June 14, 2025	May 9, 2025	May 26, 2025
July 12, 2025	June 6, 2025	June 20, 2025
September 6, 2025	August 1, 2025	August 19, 2025
October 18, 2025	September 12, 2025	September 30, 2025
December 13, 2025	November 7, 2025	November 24, 2025
February 14, 2026	January 9, 2026	January 23, 2026
April 11, 2026	March 6, 2026	March 24, 2026
June 13, 2026	May 8, 2026	May 29, 2026
July 11, 2026	June 5, 2026	June 24, 2026

To register, please visit www.act.org

NAVIANCE

Many components of the Holy Cross Counseling curriculum are powered by a computer database called Naviance. All students have an account with a username and password to access their profiles starting in Grade 9. If you have forgotten your username or password, please see your School Counselor to obtain it.

STUDENTS use Naviance to:

- Create a resume
- Complete the Interest Inventory Profiler
- Utilize the College Search engine
- Compare schools, admission requirements and view acceptance rates
- Create College lists
- Request Letters of Recommendation (See below)
- Connect to their Common App
- Receive valuable information via Email

COUNSELING OFFICE uses Naviance to:

- Evaluate student's career interests
- Help navigate College searches
- Guide students to finalizing College Lists
- Send Letters of Recommendation
- Send School Reports to Colleges
- Send Transcripts to Colleges

TEACHERS use Naviance to:

- Receive requests for and send Letters of Recommendation

REQUESTING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION THROUGH NAVIANCE

Most schools require two letters of recommendation for admission. However, some schools may require more. Be sure to check each school's requirements regarding the recommended amount of letters they require for application. Letters of recommendation typically come from teachers that can speak on behalf of your academic work. Schools may also accept and/or request letters from a leadership or community service supervisor, and/or athletic coach. Think about the educators who know you best and will be able to write a letter that represents your academic strengths, character and dedication to your educational experience.

STEPS TO REQUEST LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Step 1: Request in-person, a letter of recommendation from your teachers, counselors, supervisors and/or coaches. It is important that you do this first. Provide the teacher with a completed Teacher Recommendation Request Form at the time of the request. Forms are available in the Counseling Office and in this handbook.

Step 2: Login to Naviance, and click on the "COLLEGE" tab.

Step 3: In the "MY COLLEGES" section, click on "LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION"

Step 4: Click on "ADD REQUEST"

Step 5: In the drop down box, select the Holy Cross Teacher you have requested to write the Recommendation. Select "General Request."

Step 6: Please feel free to add any additional comments to your teacher; including any resume components that you feel may not have been included on the Teacher Recommendation Request Form that you already provided to them (Step 1). Click on "SUBMIT REQUEST". A request email will be sent directly to that teacher who will then upload the letter directly to Naviance.

*Each teacher request will require you to repeat steps 1-6. You cannot select multiple teachers at once.

Step 7: Send a thank you note to your teacher after the letter is written!

CREATING A COLLEGE LIST

Students can use a number of resources to create a list of potential schools including the college search feature in Naviance, CollegeBoard.org or a myriad of other tools. **The ultimate goal is to find the right fit.**

Things to Consider:

1. Location
2. Size of school
 - a. Less than 2,500 = small school
 - b. Between 2,500-10,000 = medium school
 - c. Over 10,000 = large school
3. Type of setting
 - a. Rural (quiet, lots of land i.e.: Woodbury, Thomaston)
 - b. Suburban (Close to the city, but in its own location i.e.: Naugatuck, Southington)
 - c. Urban (City i.e.: Waterbury, Hartford, Danbury, New York City, Boston)
4. Public or Private institution?
 - a. Public= State funded, lower sticker price
 - b. Private= Privately funded, higher sticker price but typically have more financial aid and awards to offer
5. What do you want to study?
 - a. If you are undecided and need help understanding the different majors available, speak with your School Counselor to get a better understanding.
 - b. It's also OKAY to apply to college as an UNDECIDED major. For many schools, your first year is a "foundational year" filled with prerequisite and required courses for graduation. Majors typically must be declared by sophomore year.
6. Student Life
 - a. Athletics: Colleges can offer; Division I, II, III, club and intramural level sports. Division I and II require registration with the NCAA Clearing House at www.eligibilitycenter.org. See your School Counselor if you are unsure if you need to do this or need help registering.
 - b. Clubs
 - c. Community Service
 - d. Culture
 - e. Religion
7. Job placement/Internship opportunities
8. The List
 - a. Safety School - Student meets or exceeds all admissions criteria
 - b. Match/Target/Realistic Schools – the Perfect Fit!
Student meets all or most admissions criteria
 - c. Reach Schools
Student meets some admissions criteria
Exceptions: Ivy League, highly competitive, small institutions

WHAT DO COLLEGES REALLY LOOK FOR IN AN APPLICANT?

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Application (<i>Required</i>) | 3. Test Scores (SAT/ACT) (<i>Most schools</i>) |
| 2. Transcript (<i>Required</i>) | 4. Essay (<i>Most Schools</i>) |

5. Letters of Recommendation
(Required)
6. Extra-Curricular Activities
(Recommended)

7. Community Service/Service projects
(Recommended)
8. Leadership *(Recommended)*

COLLEGE REPRESENTATIVE VISITS

College/University Admissions Representatives will meet with interested juniors and seniors to discuss their respective schools, starting in September. Students will have the opportunity to learn more about the school and make a personal connection with an admissions officer. Students should login to Naviance for scheduled virtual visits!

The schedule for college representative visits can be viewed by scanning the code below.



VISITING COLLEGE CAMPUSES

Students are allowed 3 excused absences from school to visit colleges. Students must obtain a note or verification from the college and submit to their Counselor for the absence to be excused.

Visiting a college is the best way to get to know the school and decide whether or not it may be a good fit. Finding the right fit will depend on a number of factors including, the size of the school, the strength of the curriculum, the facilities, the environment and the student body.

Colleges and universities offer a wide variety of opportunities for visitors. College information sessions, typically led by an admissions officer, and official tours, typically led by a current student, are highly recommended. Classroom visits, admission interviews, overnight programs, meetings with staff and faculty or special program directors and coaches and informal conversations with students are also experiences that may be beneficial to you. Tip: Sending a thank you note after an interview or tour can go a long way and helps build your profile for college admission counselors.

COLLEGE INTERVIEWS

Many colleges offer the opportunity for prospective students to interview. Interviews may be available on campus with an admissions officer, a student intern, or even off-campus in your own community with an alumni representative. Most interviews are informational in nature and offer the student the opportunity to ask questions and get to know the school better. They also allow the interviewer to get to know the student better. Some interviews carry more weight in the admissions and application process. In either case, a college interview is a great way for a student to express their level of interest in a school and make it a more personal process.

**Students can see their Counselor for interview tips and sample interview questions.*

COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

Once you have finalized your college list, it's finally time to apply! The first thing you need to do, is check the deadlines to all schools to which you are applying. These are stated in Naviance, as well as on the college website. Before you apply, determine which application deadline you will be using. Below is a description of the different types of application deadlines:

Early Decision (Binding)- You are only allowed to apply "Early Decision" (ED) to ONE school. This application is a binding contract that means, if you are accepted, YOU MUST ATTEND THAT SCHOOL! Be sure that this is your first choice school and that you absolutely want to go there!

Early Action (non-Binding)- EA Deadlines are much earlier than regular or rolling decision deadlines. Applying EA shows the school that you are highly interested in their institution and have a good chance of attending if you are accepted. There is no binding contract with "Early Action". A few advantages to applying early action is, getting a head start on deciding what schools you were accepted to as well as the opportunity to be awarded more financial aid.

Regular Decision- This is the most common type of application. Deadlines can vary widely- from December 1st to February 15th. Even if you are applying Regular Decision, the Guidance Department encourages you to submit your application as early as possible.

Rolling Admissions- This application does not have a deadline and the school can accept students, up until the first day of classes. Guidance advises you to NOT wait until the last minute! The longer you wait, the less financial aid you can be offered!

***Deadlines-** Be cautious of specific deadlines for applications (found on Naviance and college websites). If there is a deadline, make sure applications are in BEFORE the date, not the day of! Applications will be looked at based on the postmark date.

SAVE TIME: Check www.Commonapp.org to see if the schools you are applying to are offered through Common App. Common app is a website that allows you to send the same application to multiple schools instead of individual applications for each school. (Not all schools are available through Common App).

COLLEGE ESSAY

Most students at Holy Cross will complete their college essay in their senior English classes. The essay is sometimes optional for applications, but is typically used in the final factors of being accepted or denied from a school.

Grammar is critical in essays. You should take twice the amount of time it takes you to write the essay to edit it! Have multiple people read it before submitting it to a school. Proof read, proof read, proof read!

Common app essay prompts are available on www.commonapp.org.

COLLEGE APPLICATION

Student Responsibilities:

1. Completing the Application (either Common Application or the College's own unique Application)
2. Writing the College Essay: Holy Cross students will work on their college essay in their senior English classes at the beginning of the year. Teachers will help them to edit and refine their essays.
3. Requesting letters of recommendations from their teachers in person THEN through Naviance. This should be done at least 3 weeks before deadlines!
4. Providing your Counselor with the HCHS Guidance Recommendation Form and Brag Sheet so that they can write your Counselor Recommendation Form.
5. Requesting transcripts from Counselors (at least 2 weeks before deadlines!)
6. Sending SAT and/or ACT scores to schools
7. Applying for scholarships (Local scholarships found in the School Counseling office)
8. DIVISION I and II ATHLETES ONLY: Registering with the NCAA clearinghouse before going on any official visits to schools (i.e. Overnight visits). Visit www.eligibilitycenter.org to register.
9. Completing Financial Aid forms (this should be done with parents/guardians). You can apply for Financial aid in mid-December! Apply early, DO NOT wait until being accepted. All Students should complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and only the CSS profile, if applicable.
10. Advising your School Counselor where you were accepted and ultimately where you decide to enroll!

School Counselor Responsibilities:

1. Help students organize college lists and help with applications if necessary.
2. Sends Transcripts and secondary school reports to colleges of choice
3. Sends Counselor recommendations to schools of choice.
4. Sends letters of recommendations from teachers through Naviance to schools of choice.

Family Responsibilities:

1. Apply for Financial Aid
Every family applying to college must apply for financial aid even if you do not plan on using it. Please visit www.fasfa.ed.gov starting October 1 to apply.
2. Fill out the CSS Profile if necessary (typically with Early Action and/or Early Decision applications).

Brag Sheet/Counselor Recommendation Request Form

Student's Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Please complete this form thoroughly and thoughtfully. Your School Counselor will use this information to write a strong, personalized letter of recommendation. Be honest and provide specific details where possible.

Academic Information: (if known)

GPA: weighted= _____ unweighted= _____ Class Rank (if applicable) _____

AP, Honors, or Specialized Classes taken: _____

Intended Major/Field of Study - describe your future goals: _____

List three adjectives that describe you: _____

What extracurricular activity/job experience has been most meaningful to you and why? What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of and why?

Challenges Overcome: (Describe any circumstances in your life that may have impacted your academic performance)

Additional Information: (Please include any additional information you wish to share.)

Extracurricular Activities

(List clubs, sports, organizations, and leadership roles. Describe what you did; Indicate grades/years of participation, any positions held and awards received.)

HOLY CROSS ACTIVITIES

HOLY CROSS ATHLETICS

ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE OF HOLY CROSS

COMMUNITY SERVICE

HONORS/AWARDS (List any academic, athletic, or extracurricular honors or awards received.)

WORK EXPERIENCE (List any jobs or internships, including organization names and dates of involvement.)



Teacher Recommendation Request Form

Student Instructions: Several weeks before the first application deadline, complete a *Teacher Recommendation Request Form* for each teacher you ask to write a recommendation. In order to help your teachers write their recommendation, answer the following questions and check with the teacher to see if they would like any additional information. Please respond thoroughly and thoughtfully. (Note: This page only needs to be filled out one time for each teacher.)

Name of Student: _____

Name of Teacher: _____ Name of School Counselor: _____

Teacher Instructions: Please use the following information to write a thoughtful recommendation letter for this student. Your comments should focus on the student's abilities, performance, potential and engagement in the academic environment. If applicable, feel free to include your interactions with the student outside the classroom as well- as it relates to a club, sport or other extracurricular activity. You will receive an electronic request to upload your letter to Naviance. Please see the student's Counselor if you need assistance.

1. How long have you known this teacher and in what context? (i.e. teacher, coach, club advisor)

2. List the course(s) you took with this teacher. For each course, include the year in school and course level.

Name of Course	Year in School	Course Level

3. What is your intended major/area of study?

4. What about this teacher's class did you enjoy or find most interesting?

5. What significant memory, situation, or contribution you made comes to mind when you think of this teacher's class?

6. What were your greatest strengths and relative weaknesses as a student in this teacher's class?

7. List any in- or out-of-school awards received or exams taken (along with your score) relevant to this teacher's class (i.e. Biliteracy Exam, AP exams, SAT Subject Tests).

8. Is there any additional information you feel this teacher should know *related to their class*? (i.e. extracurricular, work, or summer experiences or other relevant courses at Holy Cross or outside of school; English: what was the topic of your research paper?; Science: what role did you play in labs?; World Language: have you studied any other languages?)

Thank you for supporting me through this recommendation process. If you need more information, I will be happy to provide it to you.

Student Signature: _____ **Date:** _____